







THOMAS NAIL 2018-10-11

IS NATURE CONTINUOUS OR DISCRETE? HOW THE ATOMIST ERROR WAS BORN

GENERICSCIENCE ATOMISM, CONTINUUM, DISCRETE, LUCRETIUS, MOTION, QUANTUM

The answer to the central question at the heart of modern science, 'Is nature continuous or discrete?' is as radical as it is simple. Space-time is not continuous because it is made of quantum granules, but quantum granules are not discrete because they are folds of infinitely continuous vibrating fields. Nature is thus not simply continuous, but an enfolded continuum.

This brings us right back to Lucretius and our original error. Working at once within and against the atomist tradition, Lucretius put forward the first materialist philosophy of an infinitely continuous nature in constant flux and motion. Things, for Lucretius, are nothing but folds (duplex), pleats (plex), bubbles or pores (foramina) in a single continuous fabric (textum) woven by its own undulations. Nature is infinitely turbulent or perturbing, but it also washes ashore, like the birth of Venus, in meta-stable forms – as Lucretius writes in the opening lines of De Rerum Natura: 'Without you [Venus] nothing emerges into the sunlit shores of light.' It has taken 2,000 years, but perhaps Lucretius has finally become our contemporary.

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